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Where We Stand

by Albert Shanker

President, United Federation of Teachers

Soviets Seek Non-Polish Scapegoat

"Solidarity" Embarrasses Moscow

I was surprised and flattered at the same time. Last Tuesday I received phone calls from a number of reporters. There's nothing new in that. But this time the questions were not about the teacher strike in Philadelphia, or the money problems of Boston, or the Reagan budget cuts or the fight over tuition tax credits. This time, the story that prompted their calls came from far away: I was being attacked by Radio Moscow.

A week ago an information office opened in New York City which will provide the American press with direct news and information from the Polish trade union, Solidarity. The information center, which consists of three small office rooms, is located in the same building as the United Federation of Teachers.

According to Moscow Radio, this information office is being run by the CIA and "Albert Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers, funnels agency money into it."

The radio report was a summary of a full length article which was to appear the following day in the Moscow newspaper, *Literary Gazette*. According to the report, "It has become known that the CIA has taken under its wing the information bureau of Poland's Solidarity trade union federation, which opened in New York." According to the United Press-International, "the radio did not offer any evidence to back up its allegations."

The Moscow allegations are, of course, completely false. But, false and ridiculous as they are, they need to be answered so that no one will mistake silence for assent.

The information office is independent. It receives no money from U.S. Government sources directly or indirectly. It pays rent, and pays for its expenses—telephone, telex, etc. The information center will eventually be economically self-sufficient, operating with funds received by selling subscriptions to a news service from Poland. Meanwhile, in order to start its operation, it has received contributions from private sources including the AFL-CIO.

Says Radio Moscow: "A CIA agent, Albert Shanker, is responsible for material supplies. He uses the cover of leader of the teachers labor federation. This organization annually receives \$100,000 from the CIA for international contacts and activities to stimulate the formation of so-called free trade unions in other countries."

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What about the Moscow charge that the teachers union gets \$100,000 a year from the CIA? Totally false, of course. We get no money from the CIA. We do, however, get some government money from the Agency for International Development (AID). These funds are not covert—they are public—and are used to help teacher unions in third world countries by sharing the techniques of bargaining, editing union papers, etc. The specifics of these projects are matters of public record; they are similar to assistance given to third world unions by German, Dutch, Swedish and other trade unions in the west.

Of course, the Soviets do have a special problem here. According to their Marxist theory, workers are supposed to revolt against their oppressors in capitalist countries, but in Poland we have the very first revolution in the world conducted by the working class, directed not against a capitalist system—but against a communist dictatorship which claims to be a “workers” state. Since, according to Marxist dogma, the workers cannot revolt against the “workers” paradise, there must be some outside force which has misled them—the CIA. How else account for what the *Wall Street Journal* calls “the colossal embarrassment Solidarity represents to world-wide Communism.” The *Wall Street Journal* says further: “American labor is indeed aiding the Solidarity movement, openly and unashamedly. It has a long history of fighting Communist domination of labor movements. It learned early in the game that Communist parties and free unions are natural mortal enemies, more violently so because free unions, more than any other free institution, threaten Communist claims to legitimacy. When American labor goes head to head with Communists, the obvious counterattack for the Communists is to claim that American labor is an arm of the American government, manipulated by the CIA. How easy it is to make lists of the CIA connections: the parallel aims, the instances of collaboration, the communications and shared acquaintanceships.”

All this would be funny if it weren't so fraught with danger. Clearly the Soviet Union isn't much interested either in our teachers union or in a small information office in New York. It is deeply concerned with the actions of over 10 million Polish workers who have the full support of the Polish people. (Moscow should be very careful with its allegations about the CIA. If it can convince the American people that the CIA was able to organize 10 million workers in Poland, it may give the CIA a better reputation than it now enjoys.) In the past, charges of CIA interference have been a prelude to Soviet brutality. Its new CIA allegations may possibly serve a later purpose. If Soviet forces move into Poland, it will not be a move against Polish workers—but a move against the secret agents of a foreign enemy. (It was the allegation of CIA contacts which was used to justify the jailing of dissident Anatoly Shcharansky.)

No one will be fooled by these Moscow charges. But the stakes are huge, not only for Poland, but for the whole world.

Mr. Shanley's comments appear in this section every Sunday. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanley at United Federation of Teachers, 230 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010. © 1981 by Albert Shanley.